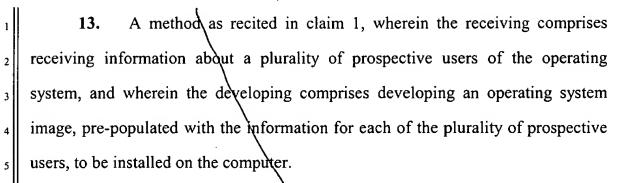# CLAIMS

1.   A method comprising:

receiving information about a prospective user of an operating system; and

developing an operating system image, pre-populated with the information, to be installed on a computer.

2.   A method as recited in claim 1, wherein the information comprises data describing the identity of the prospective user.

3.   A method as recited in claim 1, wherein the information comprises one or more of the user's name, initials, street address, state of residence, country of citizenship, electronic mail (email) address, age, social security number, date of birth, profession, hobbies, interests, and computer expertise.

4.   A method as recited in claim 1, wherein the information comprises data describing hardware preferences of the prospective user.

5.   A method as recited in claim 1, wherein the receiving comprises receiving the information in response to one or more requests for information targeted at a consumer.

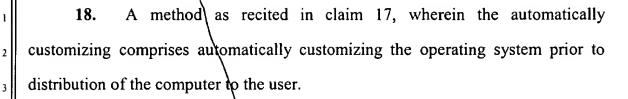6.   A method as recited in claim 5, wherein the consumer is the prospective user.

7.   A method as recited in claim 5, wherein the requests are presented to the consumer when a computer with the operating system is ordered by the consumer.

8.   A method as recited in claim 1, wherein the receiving comprises obtaining the information from a computer used by a consumer to order a new computer with the operating system.

9.   A method as recited in claim 8, wherein the consumer is the prospective user.

10.   A method as recited in claim 8, wherein the obtaining comprises accessing a bill of materials corresponding to the computer.

11.   A method as recited in claim 1, further comprising storing the information in a bill of materials.

12.   A method as recited in claim 11, further comprising making the bill of materials available to other application programs.

13. A method as recited in claim 1, wherein the receiving comprises receiving information about a plurality of prospective users of the operating system, and wherein the developing comprises developing an operating system image, pre-populated with the information for each of the plurality of prospective users, to be installed on the computer.

14. A method as recited in claim 1, wherein the operating system is organized as a plurality of components, and wherein one of the plurality of components is an identity component that includes the information.

15. A method as recited in claim 14, wherein the identity component is accessible to other application programs to allow the other application programs to be customized based at least in part on the information.

16. One or more computer-readable memories containing a computer program that is executable by a processor to perform the method recited in claim 1.

17. A method comprising:

receiving information regarding an intended user of a computer; and

automatically customizing an operating system installed on a computer based at least in part on the received information.

18.   A method as recited in claim 17, wherein the automatically customizing comprises automatically customizing the operating system prior to distribution of the computer to the user.

19.   A method as recited in claim 17, wherein the automatically customizing comprises automatically customizing the operating system during an initial boot of the computer.

20.   A method as recited in claim 17, wherein the information comprises data describing the identity of the prospective user.

21.   A method as recited in claim 17, wherein the information comprises data describing hardware preferences of the prospective user.

22.   A method as recited in claim 17, wherein the automatically customizing comprises determining, based at least in part on the received information, what functionality of the operating system to install on the computer.

23.   A method as recited in claim 17, wherein the operating system is organized as a plurality of components, and wherein one of the plurality of components is an identity component that includes the information.

24.   A method as recited in claim 23, wherein the automatically customizing comprises determining, based at least in part on the received information, which of the plurality of components to install on the computer.
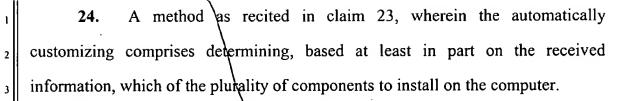
25.   One or more computer-readable memories containing a computer program that is executable by a processor to perform the method recited in claim 17.

26.   A method comprising:

accessing a record of user information describing a user, the record being available to a plurality of programs; and

customizing one of the plurality of programs based at least in part on the user information.

27.   A method as recited in claim 26, wherein the program comprises an operating system.

28.   A method as recited in claim 26, wherein the program comprises an application program.

29.   A method as recited in claim 26, wherein the customizing of the one program is performed by the one program.

30. A method as recited in claim 26, wherein the accessing comprises communicating information requests to an interface that supports one or more of reading data from the record, writing data to the record, and modifying data in the record.

31. A method as recited in claim 26, wherein the accessing comprises accessing the record from a local source.

32. A method as recited in claim 26, wherein the accessing comprises accessing the record from a remote source.

33. One or more computer-readable memories containing a computer program that is executable by a processor to perform the method recited in claim 26.

34. One or more computer-readable media having stored thereon a computer program that, when executed by one or more processors of a computer, causes the one or more processors to perform acts including:

accessing a record of user information describing a user; and

automatically customizing an operating system installed on the computer based on the user information.

35. One or more computer-readable media as recited in claim 34, wherein the automatically customizing comprises automatically customizing the operating system prior to distribution of the computer to the user.

36. One or more computer-readable media as recited in claim 34, wherein the automatically customizing comprises automatically customizing the operating system during an initial boot of the computer.

37. One or more computer-readable media as recited in claim 34, wherein the user information comprises data describing the identity of the user.

38. One or more computer-readable media as recited in claim 34, wherein the information comprises data describing hardware preferences of the user.

39. One or more computer-readable media as recited in claim 34, wherein the operating system is organized as a plurality of components, and wherein one of the plurality of components is an identity component that includes the user information.

40. One or more computer-readable media as recited in claim 39, wherein the automatically customizing comprises determining, based at least in part on the received information, which of the plurality of components to install on the computer.

41. A system comprising:

a plurality of programs;

a record of user information describing a user; and

an interface communicatively coupled to at least one of the plurality of programs and the record of user information, wherein the interface is configured to receive information requests from the at least one program and obtain the requested information from the record of user information.

42. A system as recited in claim 41, wherein the interface is further configured to receive information storage requests from the at least one program and store the requested information in the record of user information.

43. A system as recited in claim 41, wherein the user information comprises data describing the identity of the user.

44. A system as recited in claim 41, wherein the information comprises data describing hardware preferences of the user.

45. A system as recited in claim 41, wherein the record of user information is stored locally with the plurality of programs.

46. A system as recited in claim 41, wherein the record of user information is stored remotely from the plurality of programs.